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ABSTRACT

Anger and consciousness of rights may play a significant role in victimization prevention. In an attempt to examine how personal defense and assertiveness training would alter women's feelings of fear, helplessness, and anger, as well as their judgments of what rights they have, three studies were conducted. The first study, a participant observation study of two personal defense classes for women, met twice a week for 14 weeks and had an enrollment of 37. Observation indicated that learning to redefine a sexual assault and feeling angry rather than afraid were difficult for the women. The second study focused on the effects of personal defense training on perceived rights and resistance. At the beginning and end of a 14 week program, students in personal defense training classes (N=33) answered questionnaires designed to measure perceived rights and the likelihood of enacting those rights. Data analysis of both pre- and post-tests indicated a correlation between anger and the likelihood of resisting assault. The third study focused on assertiveness training. Post-test scores indicated an increased awareness of rights. The results of all three studies suggest that women can be taught to prevent victimization by responding with anger, rather than fear, to an infringement of their rights. (AG)

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Rights Consciousness: Victimization Prevention through Personal Defense and Assertiveness Training

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Running head: Victimization prevention

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Rights Consciousness :
Victimization Prevention through Personal Defense and Assertiveness Training

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In three studies we examine the role of anger and rights consciousness in victimization prevention. In the first, the senior author was a participant observer in personal defense classes for women. In addition to self-defense techniques, the students learned to expand their notion of what constitutes a sexual assault and to feel angry rather than afraid. We show how the redefinition of danger and experience of anger were problematic because both run counter to women's socialization. In the second study we evaluated the effects of personal defense training on women's sense of their rights, their reports of feeling angry, afraid, and helpless, and their reported likelihood of resisting an assault. The second author was also a participant observer in two classes with different instructors and teaching methods. One emphasized student's "right to their own body;" the other did not. Students in the former class felt they had greater rights and would be more likely to resist an assault than did students in the latter class. In the third study we measured the effects of assertiveness training on women's perceptions of their rights and their reported likelihood of exercising those rights and found significant increases. Both personal defense and assertiveness training raised the level of rights consciousness. Both teach students to experience anger and decrease feelings of fear. The results suggest that women can be taught to prevent victimization by responding with anger instead of fear to an infringement on their rights.

Rights Consciousness and Victimization Prevention

In talking about how women can learn to prevent their own victimization, we do not mean to imply that if they become victimized it is their own fault. Instead, we distinguish between responsibility for a problem and responsibility for its solution (cf Brickman et al., 1982; Kidder & Cohn, 1979). It is possible for people to assume responsibility for preventing themselves from being victimized without assuming responsibility for the causes of victimization (Janoff-Bulman, 1982). We need not blame victims for being raped, sexually harrassed, or imposed upon in other ways to show that they can learn to reduce the likelihood that those things will happen to them. The ideal solution would be to alter the cultural assumptions that give rise to the high incidence of rape or the social and economic arrangements that locate women in powerless positions (cf Sanday, 1981; Marsh, 1982). Until that day arrives, however, women (and men) can learn techniques of victimization prevention that may not change the world but will change their behaviors and chances of being hurt.

In the studies that follow we examine how personal defense and assertiveness training alter women's feelings of fear, helplessness, and anger as well as their judgments of what rights they have and how likely they are to enact those rights. Fear is the most common reaction to victimization (cf Baumer, 1978) and it also exaccerbates the victimization. Victims of rapes, muggings, and other personal assaults report that their fears and nightmares persist, as a kind of secondary victimization (e.g., Kilpatrick, Resick & Veronen, 1981; Riger & Gordon, 1981). Fear exaccerbates the victimization in another way too--by making it more likely that some assaults will be completed rather than merely attempted. Women who had been raped said their immediate reaction to the impending asault was fear; women who avoided potential rapes said their immediate reactions were suspicion and anger at the prospect of being

assaulted (Queens Bench Foundation, 1976). Responding with anger rather than fear may, therefore, be an important element in avoiding victimization.

Experiencing and expressing anger are particularly difficult for women. Stereotypes of men and women portray men as aggressive and women as not aggressive (Broverman et al., 1972). There is a grain of truth to the stereotype--research shows consistent differences between men and women in physical aggression (Frieze, Parsons, Johnson, Ruble & Zellman, 1978). Research also shows, however, that women are as aggressive as men when an experimenter tells them their behaviors are private (Mallick & McCandless, 1966) or rewards them for aggressive behavior (Bandura, Ross & Ross, 1961). Some authors have said that women and girls show more "indirect" aggression than men and boys (Feshbach, 1969; Feshbach & Sones, 1971; Ruble, 1978). There are several forms of explanation for why women are less likely to express anger or direct aggression. One form of explanation is social and developmental: girls and women are almost universally taught to be nurturant and obedient (Barry, Bacon & Child, 1957), taught to heal rather than to hurt, and to obey rather than to argue or fight. Another form of explanation is structural: women who are economically dependent risk their security when they express anger (cf Chesler, 1972). Even abused wives may find it safer to stay with an abusive husband than to strike back or strike out on their own, and consequently blame themselves rather than their husbands for the abuse (cf Walker, ; Frieze, 1978).

Personal defense and assertiveness trainers use different techniques but similar messages to teach their students to avoid being victimized. Personal defense training provides an array of techniques, ranging from very preliminary prevention efforts like becoming aware of the environment and identifying potential dangers to ultimate efforts like wounding an attacker who is close enough to strike. Assertiveness training is a less explicit form of victimization prevention. Students who take the training do not speak of

themselves as victims. The language of the course does not include "victim" and "offender". Nonetheless, students in the course are taught to prevent victimization and to redefine their problems--from personal deficits to a denial of rights. They learn to recognize their rights, including the right to say "no".

We report three studies. The first is a participant observation study of personal defense training. The second is an evaluation of the effects of personal defense training on women's sense of their rights, their reports of feeling afraid, angry, and helpless, and their reported likelihood of resisting an assault. The third is a study of the effects of assertiveness training on women's perceptions of their rights.

Study 1: Participant Observation in Personal Defense Traning

The senior author was a participant observer in classes in personal defense for women. She attended two classes which met twice a week for 14 weeks in a College of Physical Education. Thirty-seven women were enrolled in the classes.

The students learned to defend themselves if attacked and learned how to define danger, to expand their notion of what constitutes a sexual assault, and to feel angry rather than afraid. The instructors periodically referred to the latter as "psychological" changes that would occur.

These "psychological" lessons were more difficult to teach than the physical techniques. Learning to redefine a sexual assault and feeling angry rather than afraid run counter to women's socialization. Women are more likely to feel frightened rather than angry when attacked, and they require a supportive other person to say things like, "I wouldn't let him get away with that" before they retaliate or fight back (Richardson, Bernstein, & Taylor, 1979).

The instructors repeatedly told the students they must get mad if

someone "tampers with your body against your will." Initially it was difficult for the students to feel or act angry during the classroom exercises. They took turns playing the roles of attacker and victim, but the attackers were gentle with their victims and victims did not want to hurt their attackers. They took small pokes at one another, pushed with minimal effort, and did not provoke anger.

There were only a few times when the students felt and expressed anger in their defensive maneuvers. One was a lesson in hitting imaginary knees, groins, throats, and noses. The target was a padded wall in a gymnasium. During this exercise one instructor commented, "I saw somebody getting mean back there. That's good. You've got to get to feel mean, like you're really going to get somebody." Both instructors repeatedly told the students they must learn to get angry, "feel mean...feel like I'm going to get him, or he's not going to get away with that."

It was difficult for the instructors to teach the students to act or feel angry about the prospect of "someone tampering with your body against your will" and it was difficult for the students to know what constitutes "tampering" and when something is "against your will". The instructors said they wanted to:

> "change your mind set about this. Sometimes a woman might say, 'I'd rather let him do it than try to poke his eyes out'... Well, that's your choice. "

The latter phrase was a regular refrain. The instructors said they could teach the students a variety of techniques to use in a variety of situations. Whether or not the woman chose to use any of the techniques, and which ones she chose, would be her decision.

Why is it difficult for students to know what constitutes "tampering" and when something is "against your will"? The instructor posed a case:

"Suppose your boss or someone pats you on the back or shoulder and

says,'Hi, Maryann' all the time," does that constitute tampering and is it against the woman's will? It is a gesture which women usually do not reciprocate--it is often a one-sided gesture between men and women, particularly when the man is a "boss" as in the example (cf LaFrance & Mayo, 1978; Henley, 1977). The instructor went on to say, "...you can discourage that, and you might find that no one touches you at work any more." One entire class was devoted to "discouraging techniques" for use in social settings when women did not want to be touched or held. That class was punctuated by more laughter than other sessions, with students expressing embarrassment over doing anything about such events. When they learned to dislodge someone's hand from their shoulders, breasts, waists, or arms, they said "I can't imagine doing that at a party!" and "Can't you just see yourself doing that?"

The politics of touch (Henley, 1977) makes asymmetrical touching seem normal and makes its difficult for women to use "discouraging techniques." If they use those techniques they may incur costs, like being accused of making a false accusation. Some class discussion illustrates this:

Instructor: What do you think if someone like a brother-in-law comes up and fools around?

Student #1: I had a situation like that. My husband's brother came up and he was getting friendly. And I thought instead of telling my husband, who's his brother, I'd tell my brother and let him take care of it, because I didn't want to get the other family involved.

Student #2: I don't think I'd say anyting. Because how could I be sure that was what he intended. I think as soon as you start to say something about it, he would deny it. He would say you're paranoid or something like that.

Instructor: So you wouldn't do anything?

Student #2: I would just try to avoid him. I don't think there's much else you can do. You can't accuse him of rape if he didn't do anything. And talking about his intentions is very difficult.

The instructor recognized the difficulty and said, "You can't be paranoid and dodge everything." He added, "sometimes husbands meet wives this way, someone you might marry, at a club or party, but you have to judge."

There is a difference between being sexually harrassed and being raped, but conceptually the two are linked, because in both instances women fear what might happen if they say "no." They anticipate a variety of consequences, ranging from social to physical repercussions. Some think they would be unpopular and never have a date again. Others have a history of seeing women, frequently their mothers, abused for saying "no" (Ensminger, 1977). Repeated victims often accept dates with people they neither care for nor trust, and subsequently feel responsible for having agreed to something in advance because they accepted the date in the first place. They feel they have an implicit contract and must submit to their partners' wishes. This is particularly true for young victims (Ensminger, 1977).

Though rape and sexual harrassment lie at opposite ends of a continuum, they are both incidents occurring against a woman's will. Within this framework we will consider the reasons women fail to say "no" or fail to recognize some acts as "tampering" with their bodies against their will. The arrangement between the sexes provides that the man take the initiative and the woman has the option to say "yes" or "no" to what is sometimes an ambiguous overture (Goffman, 1977). If she says "no" to an overture designed to initiate something she did not want, she may avoid rape or harrassment. If she says "no" to an overture that was intended to be consensual, she risks being accused of making a false accusation and losing the opportunity to develop a relationship. If she says "yes" to each of these kinds of overtures, she risks being raped or

harrassed in the first instance but she gains the opportunity to form a relationship in the second. This is the problem in decision-making that the instructors repeatedly made the students aware of, but they were unable to help in the decision-making other than to say "it's your choice".

The instructors read descriptions of stranger rapes, some of which began quite innocently, with a knock on the door or a casual question on the street. Since the instructors and students agreed it was unwise to be "paranoid and dodge everything", it seemed reasonable to answer a knock at the door or question on the street. If, however, the question about the time of day leads to questions about which bus the person is taking, where she gets off, where she lives, and so on, it is unclear when the listener should stop answering and define the conversation as going too far. How does she distinguish between a friendly inquiry and a potential assault? The students were told that some rapes begin with seemingly innocent inquiries. They could not be told unequivocaly, however, at what point to stop a conversation or when not to answer a door knock. Instead, they could only be forewarned to be cautious--to be willing to say "no" sooner than they might otherwise.

Once a physical assault by a stranger begins, the victim is no longer in doubt about the stranger's good will. The victim then must decide whether it is better to resist or submit. Interviews with victims of rapes and attempted rapes show that women whose first reactions were fear, who thought they would be killed if they resisted, were raped. Those whose first reactions were anger were more successful in preventing rapes (Queens Bench Foundation, 1978; Bart, 1978). Women who complete personal defense training feel more capable of defending themselves (Cohn, Kidder & Harvey, 1978). We do not know whether they react more with anger than with fear and whether they have a greater sense of their right to say "no." Study II examines the effects of personal defense training on women's reported anger and fear and on their sense of their rights

to resist.

Study 2: Effects of Personal Defense Training on Perceived Rights and Resistance

Methods: We developed scales to measure perceived rights and likelihood of enacting those rights as well as feelings of anger, fear, and helplessness. The scales were based on 20 items like the following:

1) The man sitting next to me on the bus is pressing his leg against mine
2) A man grabs me from behind and puts a knife to my throat
3) At a formal dinner party, the man next to me rests his hand on mine as we talk

Following each statement the students were asked to indicate on 5-point scales:

1) Do you have the right to resist?
2) Would you resist?
3) Would you feel angry?
4) Would you feel afraid?
5) Would you feel helpless?

Thirty-three students in personal defense training classes answered the questionnaires at the beginning and end of a 14 week session. In addition to administering the scales, the second author was a participant observer in the personal defense classes. On the basis of her observations (and on the basis of data analyses in which we noticed differences between lessons) we report some data analyses for the combined classes and report others separately.

Quantitative Analyses

1. Correlations of Anger with Resistance, Fear, and Helplessness

One of the lessons taught in the personal defense classes is that an effective defense requires that the student feel angry, as we noted in Study 1.

We examined the correlations of students' reports of anger with their reports of whether they would resist and how frightened and helpless they would feel. Table 1 shows the pre-test and post-test correlations.

-------Insert Table 1 here-------

On both the pre-and post-tests the Table shows a correlation between anger and likelihood of resisting. On the pre-test feeling angry also correlated with feeling afraid and helpless. On the post-test the relationship disappeared. The students were taught to respond with anger rather than fear and they subsequently learned that the two are inconsistent. The positive correlations were not replaced by negative correlations, but the covariation disappeared.

2. Correlations of Perceived Rights and Resistance with Fear and Helplessness

The students were taught not only that they should become angry but also that fear could be paralyzing. Therefore we examined the relationship between their perceived rights and resistance with their feelings of fear and helplessness.

-------Insert Table 2 here -------

Table 2 shows that feeling afraid and helpless were initially uncorrelated with rights and resistance and subsequently became negatively correlated. The students learned that anger is consistent with resistance and fear and helplessness are inconsistent. These correlates were obtained across both sets of instructors.

3. Comparison of Means Before and After Personal Defense Training

We performed repeated measures t-tests on the students' reported levels of anger, fear, helplessness, perceived rights, and readiness to resist. Across all 33 students there were no significant differences. Therefore we separated

the data by instructor and performed separate analyses for those students taught by a pair of male and female instructors and those taught by a third instructor, a male alone. We have designated the first the X-Y class and the second the Z class.

Repeated measures t-tests showed that students taught by the X-Y team felt significantly less afraid and helpless and significantly more likely to resist by the end of the course (See Table 3)

-------Insert Table 3 here-------

By contrast, there were no significant changes in the other class on any of these variables. The only significant change in the other class was a decrease in the students' perceived rights. They felt they had less right to resist an assault at the end of the class than they had at the beginning ($t = 2.13$; $N = 13$; $p = .054$).

4. Comparison of Means Between Classes

We compared the pre-test and post-test scores of the groups taught by instructors X-Y and instructor Z. There were no significant pre-test differences on any measures. The post-test measures of perceived rights and likelihood of resisting were significantly different, however, as seen in Table 4.

-------Insert Table 4 here-------

The X-Y class reported feeling they had a greater right and would be more likely to resist than the Z class. We turned to the field notes gathered by the second author as a participant observer to explain the decreased sense of rights and resistance in one class and increased rights and resistance in the other.

Qualitative Analyses of Field Notes

Students in both classes learned the same physical techniques of

personal defense--how to fall, how to position themselves once on the ground to place a well aimed kick, how to break free from various holds, and how to injure an attacker. The differences in their instruction appeared in the "psychological" lessons, the instructors' efforts to "change attitudes," referred to in Study 1.

In the class taught by instructor Z students asked how far they should go in injuring an attacker. After they had learned how to hurt or maim, they were concerned about whether and when they could legitimately use those techniques. In response to a student's question, the instructor cautioned:

> "If somebody says give me your money, you don't poke his eyes out--it might be a kid. The first thing is to get away."

When other students asked how to tell whether an attacker is or is not intending to harm them and whether they should inflict harm in turn, the instructor again warned them:

> "It's not always clear--it's hard to judge. You know there have been cases where a guy sues another guy for injuries received, and won, even though the first guy was mugging the second. You have to think of this.... It's his word against yours."

After a class in which students learned to poke out an assailant's eyes, several students asked instructor Z whether he intended for them actually to poke out an eye or simply push enough to hurt. He replied:

> "No, no. If his eyes are open, you just have to poke, that really bothers people. If his eyes are closed though--and you do automatically close your eyes when something is coming--then, if you want to stop him I guess you do have to really

poke, and that's pretty serious."

He grimaced as he said this.

In addition to giving cautionary messages about inflicting injury that might be out of proportion to a potential assault, the instructor did not use the language of "rights". The participant observation field notes contain no discussion of rights. The classes contained instruction primarily in physical techniques.

By contrast, instructors X-Y did talk about rights and said the students' belief in their rights was a precondition for resisting and being willing to fight.

> "We teach the girls that they have a right to their own body and one one else does--no one. And that issue of hurting someone, well, we are always on that. The girls have to think about that and make up their minds. They can do it. Will they do it? We spent a lot of time on that. You can't really expect them to decide to hurt someone unless you convince them that they have rights."

Students taught by instructors X-Y did report feeling significantly more likely to resist. Students taught by instructor Z felt they had significantly less right to resist. Though the classes did not differ on either of these measures on the pre-test, they differed significantly on both by the time of the post-test. The subtle differences in the "psychological" lessons produced significant differences at the end of 14 weeks.

Study 3: Assertiveness Training: Rights to Refuse and to Make a Request

Methods

Four instructors of assertiveness training administered questionnaires at the beginning and end of their courses which lasted from 6 to 8 weeks. We have complete data from 23 students. They ranged in age from early 20's to mid 50's and their occupations were diverse, including college students, professionals, office workers, and non-employed housewives.

The questionnaire contained a 15 item Refusal scale measuring whether students felt they had the right to refuse a request and whether they were likely to refuse and a 15 item Request scale measuring whether they felt they had the right to make a request and their likelihood of making it. Sample items on the Refusal scale are as follows:

1) A boss asks me to work overtime when it is inconvenient for me
2) A neighbor asks me to babysit for her child when I want to do something else
3) A person at work asks me to organize the office party

Sample items on the Request scale are as follows:

1) Tell a person I live with I feel I am doing more than my share of the chores
2) Ask a friend for a ride that is out of my friend's way
3) Ask someone to stop interrupting me

For each item the students were asked to indicate on a 3-point scale whether they felt they had a right to refuse the request or make the request and on a 5-point scale what the likelihood was that they would refuse or make the request. The scales each tapped a variety of situations to make them applicable to the

diverse sample of students.

Results

We compared the pre-and post-test scores on the four scale totals: Right to Refuse, Would Refuse, Right to Request, Would Request. We had no participant observation from the various classes and had no reasons for expecting different results among them, so we computed t-tests for repeated measures on the entire sample of 23 students. All four scales showed significant changes from the pre-to the post-test. (See Table 5).

-------Insert Table 5 here-------

Students were asked to comment on the post-test whether their sense of rights and responsibilities had changed. Their answers indicate that they had become aware of having rights but they did not think they would always exercise them in spite of knowing they had the right:

> "I feel and know I have the right to refuse, ask and am responsible. At least in my head and lots of times in my gut. But doing it is something else because I was brought up with the implied belief that I had little rights...."

> "I see more clearly now that I have the right to say "no" and in many cases I have started to say it because to not assert myself now is very "uncomfortable".

> "I feel much stronger, more able to assert my opinion. I'm much clearer now about my rights and I find it much easier to say things like "I've changed my mind" or "I need more time to make a decision"."

Comments like these were made by students in all of the classes. Learning to recognize and exercise rights is a central lesson in assertiveness training (viz the book entitled, Your Perfect Right).

Conclusions

Anger was a correlate of feeling likely to resist an assault among the students in personal defense training. We had no corresponding measures of anger among students in assertiveness training, though learning to express anger assertively is taught in those courses. By teaching students they have a right to say "no" assertiveness trainers try to enable them to refuse requests without feeing guilty. Feeling guilty for refusing a request may be analogous to feeling afraid to resist an assault. In both cases the potential victim fears that the consequences of her refusal may be worse than the consequences of submitting.

Both personal defense and assertiveness training raise the level of rights consciousness. They may both work by turning fear or resentment into anger. They do not necessarily make the students more angry but rather enable them to express their anger directly.

Students in assertiveness training learn to say "No" rather than comply resentfully. Students in personal defense training learn to define a variety of assualts and to say "No" with force. In both instances they are taught to respond with anger instead of fear to an infringement on their rights.

Table 1

Correlations of Anger with Resistance, Fear and Helplessness

	Pre-Test Correlations	Post-Test Correlations
Would Resist	.48**	.54**
Would Feel Afraid	.47**	NS
Would Feel Helpless	.44**	NS

**p = .01

N = 32

Table 2

Pretest and Post-test Correlations of Rights and Resistance with Fear and Helplessness

	Right to Resist		Would Resist	
	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Pre-Test	Post-Test
Feel Afraid	NS	-.39*	NS	-.44**
Feel Helpless	NS	-.70**	NS	-.45**

* p = .05

** p = .01

N = 32

Table 3

Pre-Test and Post-Test Means for Students in the X-Y Class

	Pre-Test	Post-Test	t Value
Feel Afraid	51.17	40.22	3.47**
Feel Halpless	45.06	27.72	6.01**
Would Resist	76.78	84.61	-4.87**

** p = .01

N = 18

Table 4

Comparison of Post-Test Means between the Personal Defense Classes

	X-Y Class	Z Class	t Value
Right to Resist[a]	98.38	85.87	2.66*
Would Resist[b]	84.22	71.07	3.18**

* p = .05

** p = .01

[a] N = 33

[b] N = 32

Table 5

Comparison of Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores for Four Measures of Rights in Assertiveness Training Classes

	Pre-Test	Post-Test	t Value
Right to Refuse	42.5	43.8	2.06*
Would Refuse	50.6	56.5	3.74**
Right to Request	41.8	43.1	2.01*
Would Request	50.4	56.5	3.43**

* p = .05

** p = .01

N = 23

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